



JUNKET JUNKIES

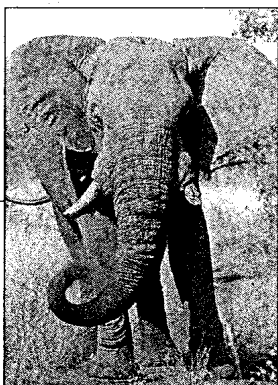
Globe trotting

Federal bureaucrats have spent \$1.7 billion on junkets, including:

■ **Brewery seminar** in Seattle, Wash., five employees, Treasury Department.

■ **Workforce development conference** in Hanoi, Vietnam, four employees, Labor Department.

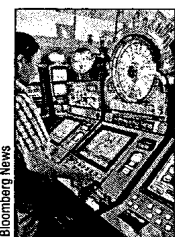
■ **Maritime conference**, Fiji, one employee, Department of Homeland Security. **Cost: \$5,717**



AFP/Getty Images

■ **Wine seminar** in California, 11 employees, Treasury Department.

■ **Elephant training**, Orlando, Fla., 20 employees, Agriculture Department.



Bloomberg News

■ **Medical conference**, Reno, Nev., 842 employees, Department of Homeland Security. **Cost: \$1.5 million**



Camera Press

■ **International Sea Turtle Symposium**, Greek island of Crete, 31 employees, Commerce Department. **Cost: \$84,000**

Feds blew \$1.7B to send staff to paradise

By GEOFF EARLE
Post Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Federal bureaucrats have spent \$1.7 billion on outrageous junkets, jetting to conferences about sea turtles in Greece, elephant training in Orlando, and maritime issues in Fiji — all at taxpayers' expense, investigators found yesterday.

Even as new technology has made it easier for feds to communicate by phone and video links, spending on conferences spanning the globe has increased a whopping 14 percent a year.

"I think there are some highly questionable trips," fumed Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), who is probing the spending. "Can't we do better?"

Hundreds of government officials flew to conferences that

just happen to be located in exotic tropical islands, sunny beach towns, and touristy European capitals.

The cost hit \$1.7 billion over the last six years, investigators said.

And feds often took in more than a few sights by tacking on vacation days after their government-paid travel, Senate investigators found.

The federal Commerce Department spent \$84,000 sending 31 people to the International Sea Turtle Symposium on the Greek island of Crete. Taking after their slow-moving subjects, feds took a total of 81 days of annual leave on the trip.

Commerce sent another employee to a land surveying conference in Honolulu — where

the reimbursement rate is \$225 per day.

To study "Strategies for Workforce Development" in the 21st Century, the Labor Department sent four people to one of the few remaining communist command economies: tropical Vietnam.

Three people went Down Under to attend a mine rescue conference in Australia on the Labor Department's dime.

Agriculture and Commerce spokesmen didn't return calls by press time.

"Travel and conference attendance are important and necessary" to the Department of Homeland Security's "mission," Eugene Schied, a homeland secu-

rity financial officer, testified to a Senate subcommittee.

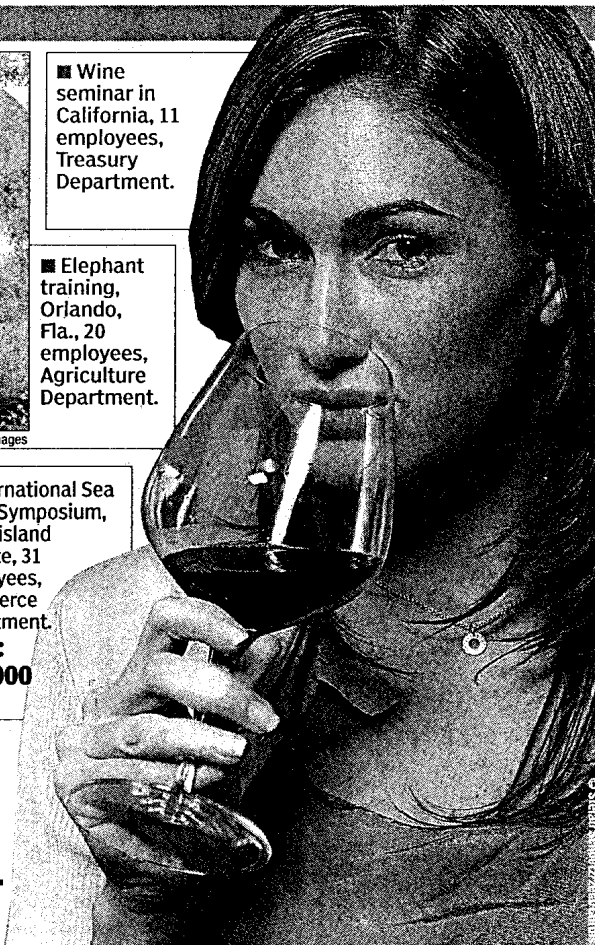
Among other astonishing findings:

■ The Department of Homeland Security paid \$1.5 million to send 842 FEMA employees to a medical conference in Reno, Nev. The conference Web site showcased polls, casinos, a go-kart tracks.

■ The Labor Department sent someone to Hong Kong, where sweatshop labor is widespread, to study occupational safety.

■ Commerce sent one person to an entrepreneurial forum in Lima, Peru.

geoff.earle@nypost.com



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